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United Nations reform: measures and proposals

Programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999

Methods of financing activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness beyond the biennium 1998–1999

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform", the General Assembly was advised that the functions of the Emergency Relief Coordinator would be more focused on three core functions, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 (A/51/950, para. 186) are: (a) policy development and coordination functions in support of the Secretary-General, ensuring that all humanitarian issues are addressed; (b) advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs, notably the Security Council; and (c) coordination of humanitarian emergency response.

2. Following upon the recommendations of the Secretary-General, the General Assembly, by resolution 52/12 B of 19 December 1997, decided to transfer to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the responsibilities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator for operational activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness, with the understanding that the resources for this task would be separate and additional to the resources of UNDP for development activities and that they would be provided by a grant from the regular budget of the United Nations for the biennium 1998–1999. By the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit, before the end of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, a report on the method of financing natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness activities beyond the biennium 1998–1999.

3. The present report is submitted in response to the request of the Assembly.

II. Disaster reduction activities prior to United Nations reform

4. Prior to the programme of United Nations reform, the natural disaster reduction subprogramme of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat was the responsibility of the Disaster Reduction Division which comprised the operational responsibilities of the Disaster Mitigation Branch, the Disaster Management Training Programme Unit and the specific mandated responsibilities of the secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The aim of the subprogramme was to reduce the vulnerability of people and States affected

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by natural and technological disasters by means of capacity-building at the national and local levels. To achieve this, the subprogramme pursued a two-pronged approach, namely, promotion and application. The latter was the prime responsibility of the Disaster Mitigation Branch, while the Disaster Management Training Programme Unit supported the subprogramme, serving as an important educational tool for national government, non-governmental organization and United Nations system partners and contributing, *inter alia*, to the integration of disaster reduction into the national development planning process.

5. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/12 B, the Disaster Management Training Programme Unit, which had been jointly managed since its inception by UNDP and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, was fully divested to UNDP in March 1998. The functions formerly exercised by the Disaster Mitigation Branch were assumed by UNDP in April 1998.

6. The disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness functions that were previously the responsibility of the Emergency Relief Coordinator were financed by both United Nations regular budget and trust fund resources. At the end of 1997, 9 of the 21 positions in the Disaster Mitigation Branch and the Disaster Management Training Programme Unit were funded from the United Nations regular budget. In the programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999, the amount of $2,309,300 was proposed for contribution to UNDP, an amount equivalent to the costs pertaining to the 9 core posts (8 in the Branch and one in the Unit) previously funded from the United Nations regular budget. The remaining 12 posts were funded from extrabudgetary resources and served in direct support of the implementation of activities financed by trust fund resources. Of those 12 posts, 3 were allocated to the Disaster Management Training Programme Unit, 9 were allocated to the Disaster Mitigation Branch (4 of which were assigned to Geneva), 3 posts were assigned to Quito for regional activities in Latin America and 2 were assigned to Suva for regional activities in the South Pacific.

III. Response by the United Nations Development Programme to the divestment of functions

7. In order to accommodate the functions divested from the Emergency Relief Coordinator, UNDP has established a Disaster Management Programme within its Emergency Response Division. In fulfilling the responsibilities related to the coordination of natural disaster mitigation activities as recommended in the programme for reform, the Disaster Management Programme also assumes the functions of disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness, as they related to national capabilities. It is expected that the Disaster Management Programme will undertake these responsibilities, which relate mainly to capacity-building, through a range of cooperative initiatives and supportive activities, including those related to collaboration in policy formulation and advocacy.

8. The United Nations Development Programme has ensured that the functions and responsibilities of the Disaster Management Programme do not overlap with those core functions to be retained by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, namely, the development and coordination of policies which ensure that all humanitarian issues are addressed, as well as advocacy of humanitarian issues in political organs. Particular note was taken of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 52/12 B, whereby the Emergency Relief Coordinator retains responsibility for the coordination of natural disaster relief. The Coordinator also retains responsibility for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, together with its related resources.

9. The Executive Board of UNDP was advised that UNDP had assumed the divested operational functions on behalf of the United Nations system (see DP/1998/18). It reaffirmed that the coordination and support of disaster reduction activities at the country level, the ultimate objectives of which are to reduce vulnerability to disasters and to protect development gains, is in the interests of both the development and the humanitarian community. Therefore, UNDP will be expected to ensure, at the country level, a coordinated and integrated approach to disaster reduction, in which humanitarian agencies, development agencies and bilateral donors will, together with host Governments, participate in the identification of needs and in the design and implementation of appropriate interventions.

10. Through the system of resident coordinators, UNDP will also be in a strengthened position to support the coordination of the disaster reduction activities of the disaster management teams of the United Nations system at the country level.

11. Programmatic support for national capacity-building for disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness has previously been provided by UNDP as part of its regular programming in disaster-prone countries. The decision of the General Assembly to consolidate the responsibility for

such capacity-building within UNDP is expected to produce significant new demands for technical cooperation and programme support activities. While some of the additional demands will be met through the application of UNDP core resources, additional resources for programme activities will be required. Trust fund resources devoted to the activities of the Disaster Mitigation Branch and the Disaster Management Training Programme Unit, while soon to be transferred to UNDP, have not been replenished during the past year.

12. In establishing the Disaster Management Programme, UNDP has made provision for the management and administrative structure previously funded from the United Nations regular budget. The resources to be provided to UNDP from the regular budget of the United Nations for the biennium 1998–1999 pertain only to the 9 posts that will continue to be dedicated to management and administrative tasks. No provision has been made for funding from the regular budget other staff support costs, such as those for travel, furnishings, equipment, supplies, printing, communications, maintenance and rental of premises. Accordingly, UNDP has to phase in activities in such a manner that all costs will remain within the amount provided from the regular budget for the biennium 1998–1999.

IV. Methods for future financing of activities for disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness

13. The options for future financing of the management and administration of the operational activities transferred to UNDP are prescribed by the decision of the General Assembly, whereby the resources for this task will be separate and additional to those for development activities. They are further limited by the significant decline in recent years of official development assistance funds, as well as the decline in UNDP core resources. The United Nations Development Programme will not be in a position to support the management and administrative costs for the assumed disaster reduction functions from its development resources.

14. The continuation of the present arrangement whereby contributions are made from the United Nations regular budget in support of the management and administration of these responsibilities by UNDP is justified on the basis that UNDP assumed, at the request of the General Assembly, responsibilities that had been funded from the United Nations regular budget since 1992. The Disaster Management Programme will be providing, within the context of the United Nations system, similar levels and forms of services in support of disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness activities as were previously provided by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and financed from the regular budget of the United Nations. Further, this arrangement recognizes that this aspect of the reform process should not entail an added burden to the already constrained voluntary contributions made towards development cooperation.

15. At its annual session, the Executive Board of UNDP took note of the options on future funding arrangements and heard divergent views on this matter from its members. There was general consensus on the need to put into place a long-term and predictable funding base for the management and administration of the divested functions, one which was not at the expense of UNDP development resources. There were, however, some differences of opinion on how that base should be established. Overwhelmingly, the members of the Executive Board reiterated the position taken by the General Assembly that UNDP core funds should not be employed for the administration and management of the divested functions. In that regard, most members who spoke indicated their support for continuing the allocation of United Nations regular budget resources to UNDP.

16. With regard to operational activities, UNDP will establish an open trust fund to support programmes similar to those previously funded through trust fund arrangements made with the United Nations. Contributions to the trust fund for the Disaster Management Programme will be additional to the core resources of UNDP made available to programme countries for activities of the type currently assisted by UNDP. While core resources remain the bedrock of UNDP activities, resources made available through trust funds and cost-sharing modalities have become increasingly vital in ensuring predictability of funding for a number of global and regional programmes. The support of donor Governments in increasing this important resource base will be required in order to maintain and build upon the level of previous activity provided by the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

V. Recommendation

17. It is recommended that the resources for managing and coordinating operational activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness continue to be separate and additional to the resources of UNDP for development activities, in accordance with the intent of the

General Assembly in paragraph 16 of its resolution 52/12 B, and that they continue therefore to be provided by a grant from the regular budget of the United Nations for future bienniums.